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AUTHOR	Callahan, Carolyn; Cooper, Carolyn; Glascock, Robert
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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the place of preservice and inservice teacher education in the needs of gifted children, outlines the role of the gifted education specialist, and discusses the competencies that gifted education specialists should have. It begins by providing a joint statement of core beliefs and goals related to giftedness and the preparation of educators by the Association for the Gifted of the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Association for Gifted Children. A discussion follows that advocates the need to prepare general education teachers for teaching gifted students and provides a list of competencies that pre-service teachers should gain during their preparation. The report also emphasizes the need for on-going staff development for all classroom teachers in gifted education. The report closes with a definition of gifted education specialists and recommended competencies and roles of such specialists, including providing direct instruction to an individuals student or groups of students, acting as a consultant to regular classroom teachers and administrators, and acting as a liaison to families and the community regarding programs and services for gifted students. A chart delineates these three roles of the gifted education teacher (teacher, consultant, and liaison) and lists effective characteristics of a gifted education specialist. (CR)

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PREPARING TEACHERS TO DEVELOP AND ENHANCE TALENT: THE POSITION OF NATIONAL EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS

CAROLYN CALLAHAN
CAROLYN COOPER
ROBERT GLASCOCK

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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EDUCATING AMERICA'S GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN

A Statement of Core Beliefs and Goals

We believe that:

- Talent comes in many forms and may be manifested in multiple domains
- Children are individuals who bring to the classroom a diverse set of aptitudes, achievements, and potential
- Gifts and talents may be developed over a period of time and may manifest themselves at different stages in a child's development
- The full spectrum of talents are present in every cultural, racial, and socio-economic group
- The population diversity that characterizes our schools is a positive source of talent potential
- The range of aptitudes, achievements, and potential among children suggests a need for varied educational experiences designed so that every child in the classroom is actively engaged in respectful, challenging, and meaningful learning
- It is the responsibility of educators to design instructional experiences to maximize the development of talents in all children

Therefore, we as organizations join in a common commitment to the highest standards for educational practices in an effort to ensure that:

- Local education agencies provide a continuum of educational opportunities to ensure that a sufficient variety of options are available to assist each child to develop one or more apparent or emergent area of strength
- Teachers have the opportunity to learn and are encouraged to implement methods necessary to develop the strength areas within every child, from the struggling learner to those who learn most quickly
- Every student have access to opportunities to develop their full potential through strength-based learning and highly engaging learning activities
- Educators and related services personnel who work with children in our schools are trained and expected to recognize and develop exceptional gifts and talents in any domain such as the traditional academic areas, the arts, or leadership
- Curriculum reflects a high level of challenge and is adapted in classrooms to the educational needs of the students in that classroom

To achieve these goals, we envision a partnership based on cooperation, collaboration, and commitment that will result in a common understanding that talent development and enhancement contributes positively to the goal of providing maximum learning for each and every child.

National Association for Gifted Children

The Association for the Gifted
The Council for Exceptional Children

7/97

PRE- AND IN-SERVICE PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Education in a democracy must respect the uniqueness of all individuals, the broad range of cultural diversity present in our schools and society, and the similarities and differences in learning that can be found within any group of students. We are fully committed to both excellence and equity for the students in our schools, and we believe that the best way to ensure both excellence and equity is to create and deliver educational experiences that match student academic, creative, social, and emotional needs, to devise opportunities and supply resources that allow all children to reach their full potential, and to provide encouragement for all students to reach the highest level of performance possible.

Students in our nation's classrooms are increasingly diverse along several dimensions. In addition to the differences that currently receive much attention in the on-going discussion of classroom variability (race, socio-economic status, gender, and culture), students also differ in the degree to which talents are manifest, the degree to which they have achieved different levels of proficiency on the learning continuum, and the degree to which they have had the opportunity to develop their potentials. These differences have significant implications for the teaching/learning process. Furthermore, an individual learner may display varying strengths of aptitude, effort, and achievement across disciplines within the school setting and in areas other than the core curriculum of schools.

Unfortunately, in many classrooms, uniform instruction prevails. If classroom teachers are to be the primary service providers for the full range of academic diversity, including students who are advanced well beyond their age peers, these teachers need more adequate preparation for their responsibilities. We recognize that most students in America's schools are not being challenged as much as possible.

Teacher effectiveness in guiding each student to the realization of potential is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to provide instruction that engages the child and provides every opportunity for the emergence of a wide variety of talent. Further, it depends on a facility in assessing children's responses and making appropriate curricular adjustments and instructional modifications. The teacher's ability to structure learning experiences in the zone of proximal development described by Lev Vygotsky is essential to achieving a level of challenge that will engage each student meaningfully and make learning a fundamental part of the everyday classroom experience. Unfortunately, teachers at all levels, novice and experienced, are too often unprepared to assess students' current learning needs and to

modify instruction so that all learners are engaged in respectful learning and are confronting the challenge of new ideas at a level of depth and complexity that matches their readiness to learn. One of several populations seriously affected by the lack of skills in assessment and curricular/instructional modifications is the population of highly able learners. To this end, we recommend pre-service and in-service instruction to specifically prepare educators to work effectively in academically diverse classrooms that include highly able learners. These include students who have manifested talent as well as those whose talents await the realization possible when learning is designed to elicit high levels of performance across a wide range of domains.

Our recommendations are based on several assumptions about the developmental processes of teaching and the degree of specialization necessary to encourage the development of talent and respond to behaviors and performances indicating potential excellence in a given field. The two levels of training addressed in this document are predicated on the assumption that the classroom teacher as a generalist needs to be introduced, during the pre-service training program, to the fundamental knowledge relating to the basic skills of talent development and nurturance. The teacher then will refine those skills both during the early years of practice and in career-long staff development. A third level of competencies would be expected of the specialist in talent development and enhancement, but this must be addressed separately and is not included in this statement.

PRE-SERVICE PREPARATION FOR ALL CLASSROOM TEACHERS

The first level of preparation for any teacher must certainly be sound preparation in the arts and sciences and mastery of the basic skills of teaching. The standards for pre-service teachers developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium provide a sound foundation for preparing teachers to plan and execute instruction in any classroom, including classrooms with high-ability students. To this end, pre-service education programs should provide opportunities to learn and should model knowledge of subject matter and how to make it accessible to students; understanding of how to foster learning and development; ability to create learning experiences adapted to the needs of diverse learners; use of teaching strategies that foster critical thinking, problem solving, and high levels of performance; and the ability to create a positive and purposeful learning environment. Additionally, pre-service education programs should also model knowledge of how to promote effective communication and collaboration in classrooms; planning for instruction based on subject matter and student need, curriculum goals, and community context; understanding of and skill in using a variety of assessment strategies; ability to reflect on, evaluate, and improve teaching and learning; and the ability to collaborate with colleagues and parents to support learning.

Implicit in appropriate application of these standards is a need to prepare classroom teachers to create classrooms that elicit and expand upon the wide range of talents present in children from all

cultural groups, socio-economic levels, and geographic settings. The basic knowledge and skills teachers need to elicit, recognize, and nurture talent should be integrated into pre-service programs explicitly in both the college and university classroom setting and in the field experiences at every level of preparation. Pre-service teachers should receive learning opportunities that afford them the following:

1) sufficient preparation in content areas to allow for adaptation of curriculum based on rich concepts, generalizations, and principles that represent the enduring ideas of the disciplines and extend beyond the level of depth and abstractness of the grade-level curriculum;

2) the means of eliciting and the knowledge needed to recognize behaviors and achievements indicative of talent potential from a wide range of learners, including those from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and the gifted underachiever;

3) knowledge of the developmental indicators of aptitude, achievement, and potential;

4) recognition of talent across a variety of learners and across a broad range of talent domains including those traditionally valued in our classroom settings and those typically demonstrated outside of school;

5) an understanding of the interrelationship of appropriate instructional challenge, student motivation, student social and emotional needs, and student achievement in the advanced learner and the learner with potential talent;

6) proactive development of meaningful learning experiences well beyond grade-level expectations;

7) continual assessment of student progress and adaptation of instructional options based on assessment data that reflect individual student needs (e.g., compacting, or telescoping of curriculum);

8) appropriate use of a variety of instructional strategies as well as technological and community resources to provide advanced learning opportunities and encourage high-end learning and creative productivity;

9) management of multi-task classrooms and approaches to reporting student progress that stress student growth rather than only comparison to a grade-level norm; and

10) an understanding of ways to provide additional challenge in the curriculum through qualitative rather than quantitative adjustments in learning activities, assignments, and exercises; of strategies to meet student needs through community linkages; and of means to address cutting-edge concepts in the disciplines.

In addition, the pre-service program should continually emphasize that diversity in our schools represents a positive source of talent potential.

ON-GOING STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL CLASSROOM TEACHERS

The preparation of teachers in our nation has traditionally ignored the specific needs of children with above-average potential and demonstrated talents, and, as a result, most teachers in the profession today have had little or no preparation to work effectively with this population in their classrooms. Even if the colleges and universities are successful in integrating the notions discussed above, we recognize that the first three years of teaching are critical to the refinement of these skills. Further career-long staff development is critical to the enhancement of skills and to the development of leadership in the profession. Teachers who are to be successful with talent development and the realization of full potential in all students, from the struggling learners to the very able learner, will need to refine and extend both their understanding and ability to effectively implement the curricular and instructional adaptations needed to maximize the potential in their classrooms. School administrators or school planning committees responsible for staff development should do the following:

1) assess the individual levels of teachers' preparation and their ability to provide appropriate curriculum and instruction to gifted and talented learners, and then design a staff development program that respects and models ways to address the academic diversity among teachers that we expect them to implement in their classrooms;

2) structure staff development programs that ensure that the teachers' content knowledge is sufficient to allow for extension of learning into sophisticated and meaningful levels of understanding in the disciplines beyond that normally studied at a given grade level;

3) provide models, practice, and peer coaching in the use of appropriate instructional strategies with gifted students; and

4) ensure that the competencies introduced and given minimal practice at the pre-service level be refined to the levels of expertise through staff development opportunities as the professional career of the teacher unfolds.

Adopted March 27, 1998
Task Force on Teacher Preparation
Dr. Carolyn M. Callahan, Chair
University of Virginia

For additional information please contact Peter D. Rosenstein, National Association for Gifted Children, 202/785-4268

The Gifted Education Specialist:
A Definition

We believe that all children deserve the highest quality of instruction possible and that such instruction will occur only when teachers are aware of and are able to respond to the unique qualities and characteristics of the students they instruct. Specialists in gifted education provide specialized consultation in differentiating curriculum with teachers in general education, enhance the standard curriculum, and promote talent development by providing specialized services for gifted and talented students that are not available in the regular classroom or through the standard curriculum.

We believe that a gifted education specialist must meet certain professional requirements. These requirements apply not only to the specialist's classroom responsibilities, but, also, to the specialist in a consultative role and in interactions with gifted children's families and the community. Professional excellence as a gifted education specialist is demonstrated by those who:

- Possess appropriate certification for level and area(s) of teaching, including special endorsements where necessary
- Seek out opportunities for professional development and make a systematic attempt to stay abreast of and/or conduct research that will inform both theory and practice in gifted education
- Initiate and participate in important activities that contribute to the profession such as writing articles for publication and making presentations on gifted education to parents, professionals, and community groups
- Assume leadership roles in some aspect of school life and make substantial contributions to school and district initiatives
- Develop collaborative and positive relationships with all staff, families, and community members
- Be knowledgeable of advanced concepts in those disciplines for which they have professional responsibilities
- Engage in in-depth studies in content and processes that are appropriate to the anticipated professional roles of the gifted education specialist

The primary roles of the gifted education specialist are (1) to provide direct instruction to an individual student or groups of students, (2) to act as a consultant to regular classroom teachers and administrators, and (3) to be a liaison to families and the community regarding programs and services for gifted students. The specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions that follow are fundamental.

A. Knowledge of the psychology of the gifted learner, including:

- Principles of human development and its variability as they relate to exceptional individuals
- The nature of individual differences, especially as applied to exceptional abilities

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- The origins and nature of various cognitive and affective types and manifestations of giftedness, including but not limited to intellectual, creative, artistic, visual and performing arts, leadership, and specific academic fields
- The cognitive, social, emotional, and environmental factors that enhance or inhibit the development of giftedness in all populations
- The historical and theoretical foundations of the field of gifted education, major contributors, current trends and issues, and potential future directions of the field
- Current and seminal research related to learning theory, giftedness, and creativity

B. The gifted education specialist must know:

- Current educational definitions as well as a variety of methods and appropriate procedures for identifying, assessing, and serving students of extraordinary potential
- The unique potentials of gifted students, including those from underserved populations (e.g., gifted females; gifted disabled; racially, culturally, or ethnically diverse; economically disadvantaged; underachieving gifted students), and their appropriate educational placement

C. The gifted education specialist must also be knowledgeable about these specific areas of appropriate programming for gifted and talented students:

- A research-based rationale for qualitatively-differentiated programming for gifted students
- Theoretical models, program prototypes, grouping practices, and educational principles that offer appropriate foundations for the development of differentiated curriculum for gifted students
- The optimal match of appropriate instructional challenge, student motivation, and student achievement in the advanced learner and the learner with potential talent

D. Finally, the gifted education specialist must possess knowledge of the following particular aspects of the field of gifted education itself:

- Current general educational issues and trends, policies, and practices at the national, state, and local levels and their relationships to the field of gifted education
- The influence of the social, cultural, and economic environment on the field of gifted education
- The interdependent relationships between general education and gifted education

In addition to knowledge, there are skills the gifted education specialist must possess. While we believe all teachers need to employ these skills with all students, we expect gifted education specialists to reflect a high degree of competence in applying these skills with gifted and talented children.

The following skills are listed according to the specialist's role as (1) teacher, (2) consultant to other educational professionals, and/or (3) liaison to families and the community.

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Roles of the Gifted Education Specialist

Skill	Teacher	Consultant	Liaison
Facilitate students' independence and development of personal responsibility for their own learning and resulting actions	x		
Develop in gifted and talented students the attitudes and skills needed to become independent, socially and ethically life-long learners, to self-evaluate, and to set and pursue personal, academic, and/or artistic goals for future success	x		
Be a role model for scholarly inquiry	x		
Interpret and apply knowledge related to the characteristics and needs of gifted and talented students	x	x	x
Use a broad selection of data to identify talent and unique needs of gifted and talented students within a diverse population of learners and across a broad range of talent domains, including those traditionally valued in classrooms and outside of school	x	x	x
Use a variety of appropriate, research-based instructional strategies as well as technological and community resources to provide advanced learning opportunities and encourage high-end learning and creative productivity	x		
Stimulate students' intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm for learning	x		
Create an environment in which giftedness can emerge and gifted students can feel challenged and safe to explore and express their uniqueness	x		
Develop, implement, and evaluate qualitatively-differentiated curricula to meet the unique intellectual, academic, social, and emotional needs of gifted and talented students	x	x	
Use techniques such as grouping for appropriate instruction and individualized planning to assist gifted students in realizing their extraordinary potential	x	x	
Integrate instruction in a variety of fields to encourage interdisciplinary thought and studies in gifted and talented students	x	x	
Intensify the challenge of curriculum through qualitative rather than quantitative adjustments in objectives, learning activities, and performance assessments	x	x	
Design curriculum that leads to students' sophisticated understandings of cutting-edge concepts in the disciplines			
Use emerging technologies in research and in the teaching of gifted and talented students	x	x	

Roles of the Gifted Education Specialist

Skill	Teacher	Consultant	Liaison
Modify curriculum (e.g., compacting) to allow time for gifted and talented students to pursue their interest with depth and breadth	x	x	
Vary teaching styles, instructional techniques, and assessment strategies to help gifted and talented students meet their individual needs	x	x	
Use current, research-based methods for applying authentic assessments of student performance for the purpose of making differentiated educational decisions	x		
Display extensive knowledge of cultural heritages of students and incorporate those interests and perspectives within the instructional process in a highly effective way	x	x	x
Monitor and evaluate program activities for the purpose of continued program development or refinement	x		
Provide consultation, collaboration, and staff development services in gifted education for teachers and administrators in the general education program to foster excellence for all students		x	
Communicate and work in partnerships with colleagues, administrators, students, families, business, and industry, as well as with the public to advocate appropriate programming for gifted and talented students		x	x
Act as a change agent in the social, political, and economic environments that inhibit appropriate services to gifted and talented students		x	x
Foster partnerships with the families and other care-givers of gifted and talented students in order to facilitate a total learning environment			x
Serve as an active advocate for students who, by virtue of their talents, require specialized services to develop those talents	x	x	x
Serve as highly knowledgeable and competent role models of creative, productive individuals who love to learn	x	x	x
Communicate accurately to students, families, educators, and the community about available gifted education provisions, including specialized services, organizations, and networks		x	x
Act as a resource for classroom teachers in differentiating curriculum and instruction for highly-able students		x	

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Finally, particular dispositions, or affective characteristics, characterize an effective gifted education specialist. Many of these dispositions span the various roles the specialist plays, e.g., as a teacher, a consultant, a liaison to families and the community. These dispositions include—

- Willingness to advocate for gifted children
- Energy, enthusiasm, and resourcefulness
- Respect for bright children and their abilities
- Expectations of high performance by all students including those who traditionally have not performed at their optimal levels
- Creativity within pragmatism
- High level of interpersonal skills
- Intellectual maturity
- A demonstrated love of learning
- Belief that children can make a genuine difference in their world
- Keen sense and appreciation of humor
- Personal flexibility
- Self-confidence
- Tenacity
- Empathy toward gifted students and their parents
- Responsibility for making things happen

The dispositions that apply specifically to the classroom role require the gifted education specialist to be—

- Secure in dealing with intellectual precocity
- Open to innovation and accepting of divergent and convergent thinking
- Tolerant of ambiguity
- Encouraging of student worthiness
- Unthreatened by his/her own limitations
- Concerned with treating students with fairness

We believe that, given the knowledge, skills, and dispositions articulated above, a gifted education specialist can work effectively with students in the classroom, with other teachers and administrators, and when serving as a liaison to families and the community. While all teachers should be somewhat knowledgeable about who gifted and talented students are and how they learn; about skills by which to differentiate curriculum in order to facilitate talent development; and about attitudes and personal qualities that encourage bright, talented students to achieve in a safe, inviting environment, the gifted education specialist must know and use this information daily in his/her roles of teacher, consultant, and liaison to families and community on issues of gifted education.

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